

NEWS & RECORD

Cancel culture is squelching open and honest discussion

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According to a recent survey by the Cato Institute, 62% of Americans are afraid to share their political views.

“The political climate these days,” the institute’s Emily Elkins writes, “prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive.”

Many of us live, work, and socialize with like-minded people, so we are rarely exposed to ideas contrary to our own. In many realms of society — academia, Hollywood, media, pop culture — ideological conformity borders on 100%.

Respondents to the Cato poll ranked themselves along a spectrum, from “very liberal” to “very conservative.” Fifty-eight percent of the “very liberal” felt free to express themselves, and rarely “self-censored.” Far fewer respondents from the other categories felt comfortable expressing their opinions. (For instance, 77% of Republicans felt the need to self-censor.) This is indicative of a culture dominated — quite ruthlessly at times — by progressives.

There is a sprinkling of heretics in every field, but most have been bullied into silence. One exception is Bari Weiss, who dared defy progressive groupthink at The New York Times.

In her resignation letter, Weiss skewers the arrogance and intolerance of her former colleagues. At the Times, she writes, the truth “isn’t a process of collective discovery, but an orthodoxy already known to an enlightened few whose job is to inform everyone else.”

Weiss, who is reportedly a moderate or a centrist, was bullied by her liberal peers and, predictably, denounced as a “Nazi” and a “racist.” Those slurs are applied to conservatives with such frequency, they’re dismissed as meaningless hyperbole.

I have received several emails from folks expressing agreement with this or that position I've taken in an article, which is nice. But sometimes, those correspondents will say something along the lines of "Please don't share this with the editors" or "Don't forward this email to anyone."

I respect their wishes, of course, while lamenting the fact that so many people believe their opinions must be hidden. But I understand their fears. In the era of "cancel culture," people get fired for saying things that are frowned upon by polite society — meaning, liberals who are perpetually offended.

The Cato poll highlights circumstances that traditionalists have been aware of for decades. Within a day or two of that poll, we learned that Fox News Channel's "Tucker Carlson Tonight" had become the highest-rated program in the history of cable news.

That's not surprising, is it? Conservatives have watched Carlson for years, because he says exactly what so many millions think (but are afraid to say). He's the SOB that the silent majority — those who censor themselves all day, every day — can applaud from the safety and anonymity of their living rooms.

A few weeks ago, Carlson rigorously denounced Black Lives Matter, which prompted several advertisers — Disney, Papa John's, and T-Mobile among them — to pull their ads from his show. But here's what's so refreshing about Carlson:

He did not apologize. He did not beg for forgiveness. He kept criticizing the left and defeating its spokesmen. (If only our elected our elected representatives had that kind of courage.) In the process, Carlson achieved record-breaking ratings. Fox News is a "safe space," as they say on college campuses, for conservatives.

Likewise, The Wall Street Journal. On July 23, that newspaper's editorial board noted the arrival of "progressive cancel culture" on its doorstep, but warned, "we are not The New York Times." The Journal, the editors declare, "will continue to promote the principles of free people and free markets, which are more important than ever in what is a culture of growing progressive conformity and intolerance."

Let the people speak.